Appendix B
Student Success and Retention Work Group Report

Background

There has been general agreement in the ETTTI Task Force that it would be difficult to discuss transformation in the USM without including student success as a major area of discussion. Also, each USM institution has invested in technologies, and introduced some innovations, that are focused on improving student success. That said, "student success" is an overly broad concept and the Work Group has struggled with identifying exactly how to meaningfully discuss it in the context of this Task Force.

The student academic journey is often thought of as a pipeline-----enter at some point with some previous education, engage in higher education, and graduate with certification in four, five, six years or more. In this context, "student success" is measured as gaining certification in a specified number of years and the common metric is one of graduation rates. The Work Group believes that "student success" requires a more nuanced understanding and the metrics similarly need to be more granular.

Given the complexity of factors involved in student success, the Work Group feels that the graphic (fig. 1) captures many of the operative elements visually and succinctly.

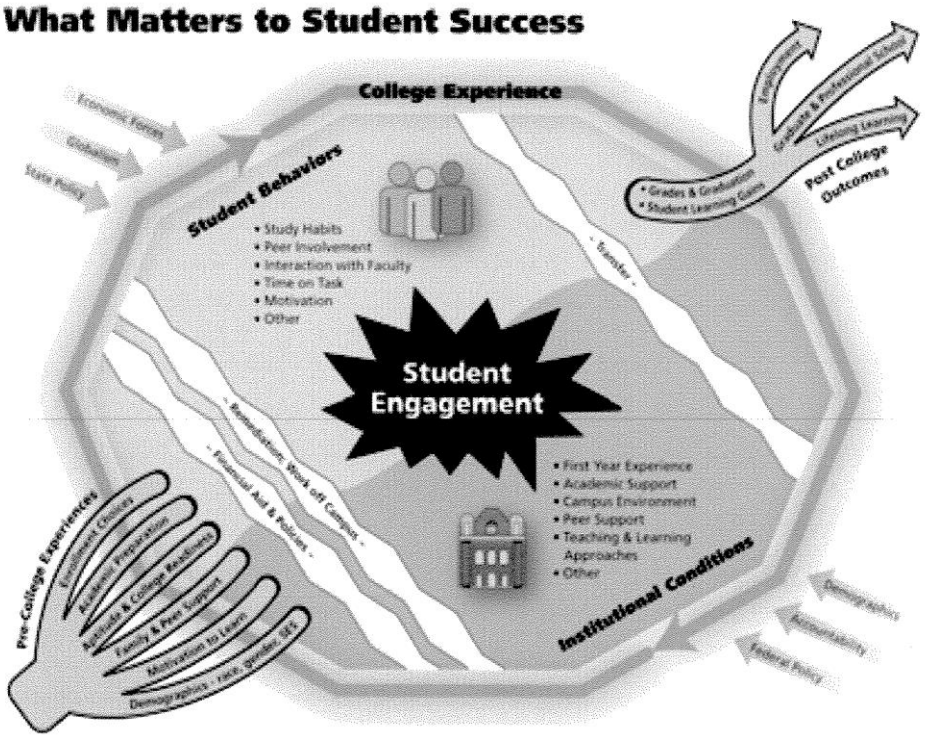

Figure 1[1]

Understanding the complexity of the factors influencing student success, the Work Group asked what can be done to bring focus to its efforts. It was decided to focus its efforts on encouraging student persistence, or from the institutional perspective, improve retention. It was also recognized that the Academic Transformation Work Group covers transformation of teaching and learning issues and the Analytics Work Group will make recommendations that influence student success.

With this focusing of effort, the Work Group undertook searches of the literature on student success and retention, and unsurprisingly, it is substantial[2]. The Work Group also reviewed the report of a study commissioned by the USM Office in 2010-11, *Assessing Student Retention Success (ASRS)*. This study, while using UMES as a test bed, identified a broad range of factors that influence student retention. The intent was to develop a practical framework that would be flexible enough to be applicable to all USM institutions offering undergraduate programs. The framework identified the factors and each institution could give priority to the individual factors that match their student demographics and institutional issues[3].

<u>Process</u>

[1] http://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/kuh_team_report.pdf
[2] ibid
[3] See Appendix A for this report

The Work Group vetted their ideas by scheduling several campus visits that undertook discussion of student success support activities at the campus level and discussed the applicability of the ASRS framework specifically to the institutional context. The campuses visited were University of Baltimore, Towson University, and Coppin State University. The outcomes of these discussions were that institutions had established point solutions for several of the factors identified in ASRS and several campuses had general frameworks that had been developed locally. Still, having a common umbrella framework, such as ASRS, may be of value

Additionally, student success and retention was a topic at several meetings of the various related stakeholder groups that meet monthly or quarterly. These include the AAAC (institutional Provosts/VP Academic Affairs), ITCC (institutional CIOs/VPs for Information Technology), and VPs for Student Affairs.

Identified Drivers of Student Success

- Sustain a campus environment that enables student persistence
- Improve retention, especially of at-risk students
- Create better alignment between student skills and educational objectives with complementary institutional expectations
- Improve completion rates at all levels where they are relevant (course, certificate, degree)

While, these are only a small subset of student success drivers, they appear to be manageable within the scope of the Task Force Work Group timeline. Improvement in any of these areas would have noticeable impact on student success within the USM.

Key Findings

As mentioned in the Background of-this report, the Work Group has chosen to focus on findings related to retention.

1. A framework, such as ASRS or others as institutionally validated and replicable, creates a flexible set of parameters by which to develop retention strategies
2. Institutional support for student success involves coordination between academic and student services areas
3. Analytics both in the form of enterprise analysis and the form of personalized adaptive learning offer new tools for improving student success
4. The first year in higher education is a critical transition period and first year experience programs are important for student success
5. Student success is monitored, but student attrition is not analyzed

Recommendations

1. Encourage each USM institution to adopt a retention framework such as ASRS or one that is replicable
    a. Benefits

i. While individual institutions may have developed local frameworks, and implemented focused actions for tactical issues within such a framework, a common USM umbrella framework would allow sharing of best practices and leveraged procurement of services that support common sustainable solutions.
ii. Since the parameters are generally quantifiable, there could be common data on strategies that work and those that don't in different contexts.
iii. Shared data allow for levels of analysis essential to strengthening institutional efforts in assuring student success

b. Challenges
i. Institutions rightly perceive that there is enough differentiation in mission, student demographics, and selectivity that locally tailored approaches may be more appropriate.
ii. Recognizing that in spite of differentiation, there is a commonality in the hierarchy of student learning outcomes.

c. Challenge Response
i. There are frameworks, such as ASRS, that are sufficiently broad that differing institutions can operate under a common umbrella. If not ASRS, we could seek another model.

2. Undertake better institutional collaboration across academic, student service, and administrative units to focus on student success
a. Benefits
i. Student success and retention issues cut across administrative lines. If these are the institutional priorities, then they should transcend organizational boundaries.

b. Challenges
i. The natural dynamic of enterprises is to have the units focused on their internal mission activities. Inter-unit collaboration requires a new dynamic that has to be promoted and nurtured by senior leadership.

3. Recognize that student demographics are in flux and student success requires continuous process readjustment to meet needs of current students.
a. Benefits
i. There is not a single, up-front fix to retention issues. This recognizes that continuous evaluation and adjustment needs to be made in tactics.

b. Challenge
i. Higher education institutions are based on long-term commitments and don't normally evolve programs nimbly. While student demographics do not change rapidly year over

year, they are changing steadily and institutions need processes that adjust to these multi-year trends.

4. Develop processes to evaluate reasons for student non-persistence and develop models to respond to findings.
    a. Benefits
        i. Students leave for a wide range of reasons. Some are due to temporary factors and some are due to long-term issue. Student retention strategies need to be informed by data and not just abstract models. This is an important, and largely untapped, source of data.
    b. Challenges
        i. Institutions are not always aware if a matriculated student who is not registered for a semester intends to return ultimately or not.
        ii. Data collection and analysis can be resource intensive
    c. Challenge Response
        i. While face-to-face exit interviews would be preferable, some aspects of data collection and analysis for non-returning students can be automated.
5. Adopt some of the recommendations of the Analytics and Academic Transformation Work Groups that are specific to student success and retention.
    a. From Task Force discussions, it is clear that there are significant insights and tools among the recommendations of those Work Groups.

<u>Implementation</u>

1. The Recommendations above require achieving a common understanding of the issues, approaches, and opportunities. This might we well achieved within the USM by holding a series of workshops on Student Success and Retention
2. Student Success support requires not just initiating initiatives, but requires systemic changes:
    a. Continuous institutional attention
    b. Collaboration across academic, student services, and administrative areas
    c. On-going staff training
    d. Establish feedback loops to continuously improve student success and retention processes
3. There are technologies that support many student success and retention processes. The Gates Foundation has been underwriting studies of issues related to student success and the technologies that are available to for institutional support. The Gates Foundation terms this initiative *IPAS: Integrated Planning and Advising Services.* IPAS is defined as "the institutional capability to create shared ownership for education progress by providing students, faculty, and staff with holistic information and services that contribute to the completion of a degree or other credential." A recent

small Educause Center for Applied Research (ECAR) study[4], with Gates Foundation funding, gives a useful summary of the state of this field and delineates some existing best practices. Community Colleges seem to be the most engaged higher education in expending resources on student success and investing in supporting technologies. The USM should watch this area closely. Since the Work group identified the first year of higher education as an important transition year, and four-year higher education overlaps with Community Colleges in this regard, we can learn new techniques from the Community College segment.

Consider the distinctions of student enrollment as retention on one hand and persistence on the other. *Retention* is all institutional programs, services, and activities provided for enrolled students. For which one metric might be return term-to-term and year to year or students' successful completion of any and all institutional offerings. *Persistence* is the change that occurs in the student as result of what happens in the programs, services, and activities. It is paramount among the variables affecting retention and ultimately student success. It is observable in the student and therefore a extremely important aspect of student success. It is most common in the changes in student habits and attitudes, perhaps, about what success means to them. A metric for *Persistence* might be the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement. It is ANALYTICS that ties *Retention* and *Persistence* together.

4. The old axiom, "you do what you measure", applies here. Graduation rates are easy to measure and so higher education tracks them carefully. That said, graduation rates are a blunt measure of student success. Measuring these might inform institutions and other stakeholders in an overall way, but they don't aid in student success per se. What is needed is a much more focused and granular set of metrics that both measure individual student progress and aid institutions in setting specific goals and measures in achieving those goals. One such set of tools that is becoming available are Maturity Indicies in various areas.

5. ECAR has started publishing Maturity Indicies relative to the aspirations and status of various academic support technology areas. An example focused on academic use of analytics can be found at http://www.educause.edu/ecar/research-publications/ecar-analytics-maturity-index-higher-education. ECAR is currently developing a similar approach relative to student success supporting technologies. In 2015, ECAR will offer a subscription service to aid institutions in using their maturity index tools and provide peer comparisons for subscribing institutions. The model should extend beyond success supporting

[4] http://www.educause.edu/library/resources/integrated-planning-and-advising-services-research

technologies and may offer value to institutions to extend the concept into other student success support areas.

Appendix

Assessing Student Retention Success
(ASRS)